G2.2: Exploring the Meaning and Behaviors of Critical Thinking in Nursing Practice

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Abstract:
Introduction: The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of practicing nurses regarding the definitions and behaviors of critical thinking (CT) as it occurs in the practice of nursing. Three research questions guided the study. To answer these questions a sample of 21 registered nurses, with a baccalaureate degree and at least two years of nursing experience, obtained through maximum variation sampling were interviewed.

Method(s): The qualitative methodology used for this study was naturalistic inquiry and included the use of critical incident technique.

Results: Participants were asked to describe a critical incident which challenged their practice. The analysis of these descriptions led to the development of a conceptual definition of CT. They were asked additional questions about their own CT attributes, their practice environments, and the behaviors of their colleagues which they felt were indicative of CT. The coding of these responses into themes led to the following CT behaviors: anticipatory, outcome-focused thinking; maintaining a holistic view of the patient; questioning and seeking out additional information; prioritizing; organizing and active planning; and problem solving and step-by-step processing of information. Finally the behaviors and attributes as derived from the data were compared to Scheffer and Rubenfeld's (2000) Consensus Statement on Critical Thinking in Nursing. Many similarities were found between the attributes and behaviors of CT identified in this study and the Consensus Statement. Additionally the barriers to and facilitators of CT in practice were explored to gain a more complete understanding of the nurses' experiences with CT in practice.
**Discussion & Conclusions:** The findings from this study provide insight on the perspectives of practicing nurses on CT and points to implications for practice, education, and research. The participants expressed a need for a supportive collaborative practice environment that included more time for CT. They identified that education needed to include more "hands on experiences" and a higher level of questioning for students. Finally, more studies such as this one need to be conducted as a foundation for the development of an instrument that can measure CT in nursing.

**Abstract History:**
This abstract has been presented or accepted for presentation in whole or in part at the SNRS or other scientific meeting.
Student Poster Presentation of Abstract of Proposal at the 2006 SNRS in Memphis

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